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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION ROUNDDUP,

SEPTEMBER 26

REF: Almaty 2985

¶11. (U) This is the second in a series of weekly election roundups, in advance of Kazakhstan's December 4, 2005 presidential elections. Items were drawn primarily from the local press and media.

Would-be Candidates for President

¶12. (U) As of September 21, the Central Election Commission (CEC) had received 12 applications from would-be candidates: current President Nursultan Nazarbayev; Senator Uyalikhan Kaysarov; the leader of the opposition block "For a Just Kazakhstan," Zharmakhan Tuyakbay; businessman Oten Salim Sagyndykuly; member of the Mazhilis (lower house of Parliament) and People's Communist Party Yerasyl Abylkasymov; the leader of the "Attan Kazakhstan" anti-nuclear movement, Amanatay Asylbek; lawyer Mekemtas Tleulesov; an unemployed self-nominee Meyramkul Kozhagulova (female); a second female self-nominee, Maya Karamayeva; President of "KazAgro" National Federation of Farmers Baltabay Rakhimzhanov; former wrestling coach Zhaksybay Bazilbayev; and green movement activist Mels Yeleusizov. Both Karamayeva and Kozhagulova failed their Kazakh language tests.

¶13. (U) After passing the language test and meeting other pre-registration requirements, candidates must collect approximately 90,000 voters' signatures in order to be officially registered. (Specifically, to be registered a candidate must collect signatures equal to 1% of the total number of registered voters nationwide. To ensure broad geographic support, he or she must collect the signatures of at least 1% of registered voters in two-thirds of all oblasts.)

Baimenov Jumps in at the Last Minute

¶14. (SBU) On September 25, the Ak Zhol party nominated Alikhan Baimenov to run for the presidency, thereby dashing FJK's hopes of maintaining unity among the opposition. Baimenov called on all democratic organizations to unite their efforts, saying "We have one opponent - the current power. We have one goal - Kazakhstan's prosperity. And we should hold together." With his relatively high profile in the regions, Baimenov is expected to draw votes away from Tuyakbay.

Control over the Media Tightens

¶15. (SBU) According to FJK contacts, due to pressure from Kazakhstani authorities on September 26 the printing house Vremya Print announced that it would no longer publish opposition newspapers. As a result the publication of several opposition papers such as Epokha, Soz, Zhuma Times, and Svoboda Slova will be halted at least temporarily. FJK representatives claim that Kazakhstani law forbids printing newspapers outside the country, so they cannot use the Freedom House press in Bishkek.

¶16. (U) The Prosecutor General issued a statement on September 17 warning media owners, editors-in-chief, reporters and distributors of media products that prosecutors are tightening up their oversight. The statement noted an increase in the number of publications discrediting high government officials or people who intend to become government officials, along with slander, provocative and false information, and the publication of secrets that are protected by law. It also charged that

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illegal production of media takes place. The statement reiterated that it is illegal to encourage through propaganda the violent change of the constitutional order; the destruction of Kazakhstan's integrity; the undermining of the country's security; war, social, racial, ethnic,

religious, tribal superiority; or the cult of cruelty and violence. It is also illegal to publish or disseminate materials which knowingly discredit the honor, dignity and reputation of a candidate to the post of President of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

¶17. (U) On September 20, the "Journalists in Distress" fund issued a statement reporting increasing pressure on the opposition press on the run-up to the presidential election. According to the president of the fund, Rozlana Taukina, they have received complaints from five different organizations about ungrounded refusals by the Ministry of Culture, Information and Sports to register mass media outlets.

CEC Approves Rules for the Election Campaign

¶18. (U) On September 16, the CEC met to approve the rules for campaigning. According to Vladimir Foos, CEC secretary, the draft rules are based on those used in last

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year's Mazhilis elections. Some clarifying points and definitions were added. The rules regulate the procedure for election commissions to publish their statements in media, refutation statements, scheduling of publications and debates by candidates. Among the points clarified in the new rules is the requirement that the CEC will select, pursuant to legislation on government contracts, the media outlets that will carry candidate campaign materials funded by government resources. The rules will be registered with the Justice Ministry and then published.

¶19. (U) At its September 16 meeting, the CEC also specified that candidates would receive 94,000 tenge (approximately \$700) from the government for transportation. Each candidate will receive a total of 5.5 million tenge (\$41,000) from the government for the election campaign. Candidates nominated by public organizations are entitled to have a campaign fund composed of a maximum of: personal funds (46 million tenge, or \$342,000); contribution of the public organization that nominated the candidate (64.4 million tenge, or \$480,000); and voluntary donations by citizens and organizations (138 million tenge, or over \$1 million). The total election campaign fund of a candidate nominated by a public organization can therefore not exceed 248.4 million tenge (\$1.85 million). The election fund of a self-nominated candidate cannot exceed 184 million tenge (\$1.37 million), including a maximum of 46 million tenge (\$340,000) of personal funds and 138 million tenge (slightly over \$1 million) in voluntary donations from citizens and organizations.

E-voting

¶10. (U) The CEC also announced plans to use the e-voting system Sailau, which it says was upgraded and simplified after last year's parliamentary elections. The CEC stated that due to the OSCE's calls for gradual implementation of e-voting it would not be used in all polling stations. The plan is to use it at only 1627 precincts, or 20% of all precincts compared to 10% in last year's elections. Voters would be free to choose between electronic and traditional paper-ballot voting.

Nazarbayev Launches Web Site

¶11. (SBU) In a move raising questions about the use of administrative resources, the Presidential Administration launched a new web site on September 21 dedicated to Nursultan Nazarbayev. The site, www.akorda.kz, has 11 sections and more than 60 headings and contains information about Kazakhstan and the president in three languages - Kazakh, Russian and English. Users of the site will be able to write a letter to President Nazarbayev, read his books and view photos.

Comments from the Presidential Administration

¶12. (SBU) Presidential political advisor Yermukhamed Yertysbayev, whose comments often foreshadow GOK policy shifts, shared his views on the upcoming presidential election on September 20 with Interfax. Yertysbayev predicted that the winner would receive at least 70% of

the vote, but declined to name the winner as "the law

prohibits campaigning before October 25." "The person who comes in second will become the national opposition leader and will have good chances of success during the next presidential election." Yertysbayev speculated that Ak Zhol leader Alikhan Baimenov, who at that time had not yet announced his candidacy, was hesitating because he feared coming in third and "being consigned to political oblivion." Yertysbayev commented that, in contrast to Baimenov, Tuyakbay was not a well-known and popular figure in the regions. Yertysbayev said that there was no need for the President to participate in pre-election TV debates. "If the President's rating was 51% and his principal opponent had 49%, then Mr. Nazarbayev would participate. In the current situation when his rating is over 80%, Nazarbayev's participation in TV debates would lead to a decrease in electoral support. If Tyson or Hollyfield fought against an amateur, would it enhance their prestige?" Yertysbayev stressed that the authorities are interested in holding fair and transparent election and "as the chances of success are so good, it is in our interest that the maximum number of international observers arrive in the country to monitor the election."

International observers

¶13. (U) During a September 20 meeting in Warsaw with OSCE ODIHR Director Christian Strohal, CEC Chairman Onalsyn Zhumabekov formally invited the OSCE to monitor the upcoming presidential elections. The Kazakhstani MFA circulated a diplomatic note to all embassies and international organizations on September 16 inviting foreign observers and mass media. EU Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner reportedly told FM Tokayev during their meeting in New-York that the EU would send an observation mission.

¶14. (U) The opposition "For a Just Kazakhstan" movement sent an open letter to pro-presidential political parties, calling on them to join FJK in inviting observers from the Carter Center to monitor the upcoming presidential election. The appeal stressed that "the Carter Center is a leading non-governmental institution on professional monitoring and objective analysis, especially in transition countries."

Harassment of the opposition

¶15. (SBU) The opposition group Alga, which contains many members of the liquidated DCK and is still trying to register as a party, reports that since July the authorities have stepped up pressure. Measures have included mass detentions of party activists, seizures of party advertising materials, and prosecutions. 113 activists and members of the party advertising team have reportedly been detained throughout the country; 52 have allegedly been subjected to psychological pressure and threatened with assault and battery. Five activists have been arrested and 15 have received administrative warning and have been fined. Newspapers and other publications have been seized, including Azat (640 copies), Set KZ (12,000 copies), Pravda (5,012 copies), Zhuma-Times (2,770 copies), Apti KZ (178 copies), Almaty-info (126 copies), newspaper digest supplements (3,500 copies), and Alga advertising materials (more than 8,500 copies). Alga activists also report that 826 applications filed by people wanting to join the party have been illegally seized. Alga has filed dozens of complaints with the Procuracy and MOJ, but claims to have received "trivial" responses.

¶16. (U) The FJK press service reported on September 12 that activist Bekdulla Saduakasov was arrested in Kyzylorda Oblast while receiving newspapers delivered by a commuter bus. See reftel for details of other FJK arrests.

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